

## **Books and the Timeless Ritual of Reading**

Perhaps it's the change in the weather from cool autumn evenings to snowy winter nights that keep us indoors. We snuggle up under a warm blanket or in an oversized chair by the fireplace and read of course with a hot chocolate or other hot drink handy!

We poke around in our favourite bookstores for hours to find that special gift for loved ones in our lives and it doesn't seem to matter what the subject is. We get lost in them all from new and classic faery tales to the latest version of events that have shaped our little rock called Earth.

From earliest childhood we are drawn to them. As babies we love to drool and chew on them. When we get a little bigger we actually start paying attention to the pictures.

As older kids we hide under the covers at night with a flashlight and read until we finally fall asleep from exhaustion. The beautifully woven stories and breathtaking illustrations magically transport us to faery lands or hidden pirate treasure. When we're old enough we can finally ditch the flashlight.

Without books we would never know the great wit and wisdom of Erma Bombeck or the Victorian world of Charles Dickens.

Books have been around for a very long time. Cave drawings are essentially books drawn by our ancestors to teach their children family and tribal traditions.

We love traditions especially when they are about the holidays. We put the tree up on the same day each year. We have a favourite star or angel for the top. The reading of a traditional family favourite, especially aloud, is always a wonderful memory for the season. If you do not yet have one give yourself a wonderful gift and start now! It doesn't matter whether you are in a house full of children or just sitting at home with the dog and cat.

Books can even smell good especially old leather bound editions that were glued together and bound with catgut. I'll bet that most of you reading this article remember old books at your grandparents' home.

One of my favourite memories of books is my maternal grandparents' enormous collection of books at our family cottage on the shores of Lake of Bays near Huntsville, Ontario.

Books are an enormous and ever expanding resource for students and teachers. They can teach us the correct spelling of a word or help us find Bundaberg. They connect us to other cultures and places without ever leaving home. Who hasn't at least read a brochure or story of a foreign country before visiting? We even read about what's happening in Disney Land before heading south and that's just to California. I'm sure we would all bone up on our knowledge of Egypt or Italy long before boarding the airplane.

Reading is so important for all of us no matter who we are or what we do or where we live. We are totally surrounded by written words. They tell us how to do things or where to find what we are looking for.

Many of us have the enormous privilege of being raised by parents who are literate enough to read to us and who in many cases begin the teaching process. Others however are not so fortunate.

Everyday we hear of children in countries whose names we barely recognize who do not have books or are even being taught this precious gift. The sad truth of the matter is that illiteracy is just as much a sad reality for many Canadian children and adults.

We must do everything we possibly can to encourage our children to read and to reach out to adults in our community who also need help with this important skill. One of my favorite programs is the PAL (Partnership Approach to Literacy). It is so heartening to see my student's face light up as they learn a new word or how to correctly pronounce a word that has more letters in it than their own complete name. It is never too late to learn or teach. If you have local programs volunteer or please help to create one.

Without the ability to read we are trapped in a very lonely and often silent world of confusion and frustration.

Books are old and comforting friends in our modern and crazy Internet world. Besides, to be honest, just how much fun is it really to sit in front of a computer screen and read?

Books are a whole lot tougher than computers too, they never crash! We can even read them in a power outage. Hey, all you need is a flashlight!

Books educate, illuminate, encourage debate, and just plain fascinate. Aren't books cool?

As you can plainly tell I love to read. I also love to write and have been doing so for many years. I write mainly children's stories and poems but love to tackle new and interesting projects on practically any subject matter.

My first major foray into the world of publishing is a story and colouring book entitled Sunny's Grand Adventure. Sunny is a daisy who wants to fly. My very dear friend and illustrator Pam (P.J.) Masi and I self published 'her' in the fall of 2004.

So many people tell us that they love how she reaches for her dream no matter what others might think and that we all need to do the same.

So give the gift of delight and wonderment this holiday season or any time of year!

Have a good holiday everybody!

Love,  
Val

*P.S. Bundaberg is on the east coast of Australia at the southern tip of the Great Barrier Reef.*